



Town of Garner NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Downtown Development Manager Joins Town

Mari Howe has been hired as downtown development manager, replacing John Hodges, who served in a similar role as executive director of the Garner Revitalization Association (GRA) before being named assistant town manager-development services.

Howe, a Garner resident, has joined the Town's Economic Development Department and will manage the Garner Main Street Program, promote and facilitate implementation of the Historic Downtown Garner Plan, and serve as a staff liaison to, and executive director of, the GRA. She started in her new position on May 18.

The downtown development manager position was created as part of organizational changes that began last fall. Funding for the position was previously provided to GRA as part of its annual grant to support downtown development and manage the Garner Main Street Program. The position is now a part of the Town's Economic Development Department and will serve as a staff liaison to GRA. Funding to GRA is being reduced to offset the change.

Howe earned a master's degree in city and regional planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a concentration in community and economic development. She has also completed coursework toward her certified economic developer designation through the International Economic Development Council.

"Mari's educational background, work experience and knowledge of the Garner community make her an ideal fit for this position," Hodges said. "I am excited to have someone with her skills set lead the next chapter of our downtown development efforts."

Howe was selected through a staff-managed assessment-center-type process that included representation from Town administrative staff, peer staff, Town Council and the GRA Board of Directors.

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“Mari really gave us a lot of insight and ideas into things we might do in the future for our downtown. It was very inspiring,” said Patrick Byrd, chair of the GRA Board of Directors and co-owner of two downtown businesses. “She really seems to have a grasp of what we need as an organization to continue moving forward.”

Howe worked for five years with the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation as an entrepreneur resource specialist. In that position, she organized a regional entrepreneur initiative and created Chatham County’s first youth business plan competition to engage student entrepreneurs. Most recently, Howe worked for the Small Business Technology and Development Center as a senior research analyst.

For more information about the GRA and downtown Garner, visit downtowngarner.com.

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